

MEMORANDUM

TO: Full Committee

FROM: David Potter
Director of Research

DATE: September 4, 2007

Subject: Review of the U.S. History and the Constitution End of Course
Field Test

The Education Oversight Committee (EOC) is charged in the Education Accountability Act to review the field tests for new assessments in the state assessment program:

“After the first statewide field test of the assessment program in each of the four academic areas, and after the field tests of the end of course assessments of benchmark courses, the Education Oversight Committee, established in Section 59-6-10, will review the state assessment program and the course assessments for alignment with the state standards, level of difficulty and validity, and for the ability to differentiate levels of achievement, and will make recommendations for needed changes, if any. The review will be provided to the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education, the Governor, the Senate Education Committee, and the House Education and Public Works Committee as soon as feasible after the field tests. The Department of Education will then report to the Education Oversight Committee no later than one month after receiving the reports on the changes made to the assessments to comply with the recommendations.” (Section 59-18-320 A)

The EOC also has a role in the adoption of state assessments:

“Any new standards and assessments required to be developed and adopted by the State Board of Education, through the Department of Education, must be developed and adopted upon the advice and consent of the Education Oversight Committee.” (Section 59-18-320 D)

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In December 2006 the EOC reviewed the U.S. History and the Constitution End of Course field test and adopted the following recommendations:

1. Continue the field test of the U.S. History and the Constitution end of course test during 2006-2007 by administering the currently prepared draft operational forms to students enrolled in the course. Monitor the performance of students on the U.S. History and the Constitution tests administered in the 2006-2007 school year and evaluate the technical characteristics of the items and the performance standards in Summer 2007 for possible revision.
2. In cooperation with the State Department of Education, survey U.S. History and the Constitution teachers in Spring 2007 to describe their understanding and use of the U.S. History and the Constitution standards and relate the results to student performance.

In April and May 2007 a survey regarding the course academic standards was distributed to the 633 teachers of the U.S. History and the Constitution course identified by 84 of the 85 school districts in South Carolina. A total of 312 teachers (49.3%) responded to all the survey questions. The teachers' responses to the survey were summarized and distributed to EOC members at their August 13, 2007 meeting. In addition, the survey results were distributed to the members of the Instructional Leaders' Roundtable and EOC staff discussed the findings with them at their August 16, 2007 meeting.

Strengths identified in the U.S. History and the Constitution End of Course test:

- The test is well-aligned to the academic course standards;
- The cognitive demands of the test items are well-aligned with the rigorous academic course standards;
- The test has adequate technical characteristics, although many of the test items are difficult (the average score on the field test was 41% correct);
- The test can provide a measure of accountability for implementation of high academic standards.

Concerns Identified:

The difficulty of the test diminishes its effectiveness to "differentiate levels of achievement" (Section 59-18-320 A). The survey of U.S. History and the Constitution teachers in May 2007 and subsequent discussions with members of the Instructional Leaders' Roundtable suggest the following factors accounting for the low student achievement observed:

- There is poor alignment between the content of the standards and the content of classroom instruction;
- Teachers reported several factors related to time which adversely affect students' learning of the course standards:
 - ✓ There is too little time to teach all of the standards, especially in one-semester "block" classes;
 - ✓ There is also too little time to teach for students to attain the higher levels of understanding required for the course standards and the test;
 - ✓ Some teachers report concerns that the test is administered too soon before the end of the semester to complete instruction on all of the standards;

- Teachers reported they need help with determining an effective pace for teaching the course standards, especially when time is limited;
- Teachers reported that support materials for professional development are not available or are inadequate;
- Students may not be motivated to perform well on the tests when there are no perceived consequences to them for poor performance or benefits for high performance.

Recommendations:

1. The State Department of Education (SDE) should take actions to improve the alignment among the U.S. History and the Constitution course standards, the instruction of those standards, and the End of Course test. Prior to EOC approval the SDE should provide evidence for the enactment of those actions to the EOC. The actions to improve the alignment may include, in addition to other possible activities:
 - ✓ Examine the course standards and End of Course test to identify or affirm the essential content to be learned and tested;
 - ✓ Complete the development of the Teacher's Guide, including guides for effectively pacing instruction, to the U.S. History and the Constitution course standards and End of Course test.
2. Continue the administration of the U.S. History and the Constitution End of Course test as a field test and provide feedback to schools and districts on the performance of their students.
3. The actions undertaken to improve the alignment among the standards, instruction, and the test should be accomplished by June 2008 to allow for professional development activities with teachers during Summer 2008.

As specified in Section 59-18-320 A, the SDE must respond to recommendations regarding the field test made by the EOC within one month. The EOC may approve the use of the test based upon the response from the SDE.